

MUSIC

Doctor is now going to devote all his attention to concerts by Elretha Britz | Beeld/Volksblad/Die Burger 19 August 2017

Now that academic work is behind him, Ben Schoeman can focus all his attention on his concert career. It is as if this South African pianist gave a sigh of relief. He received his doctorate from the University of London in January and, since he is now older than thirty, he feels he is emotionally mature enough to make CD recordings.

Schoeman, residing since 2010 in London, arrived in South Africa this week for a short concert tour after five strenuous performances at the Edinburgh Festival in Scotland. "I had to rehearse and play such a large repertoire (in Edinburgh) that I did not even have time for a tot of whisky. Directly after that, I performed at St Martin-in-the-Fields in London and then left right away for Heathrow Airport."

Schoeman's life had another change this year – for the first time he no longer has a teacher. The years of lessons from many great pedagogues eventually enabled him to do things his own way. In a conversation two or three years ago, he told me that he keenly focused on Robert Schumann's music, so much so that he went to take lessons from a Schumann specialist [Prof. Eliso Virsaladze] in Moscow. "Schumann is still my favourite composer; that is why I included his *Kreisleriana* in my programme; an intellectual work which I believe audiences will appreciate."

Schoeman's intense love of music has been confirmed in several interviews over the years. So it does not surprise me that he says Chopin is also a favourite, and of course Liszt: "Everyone knows how much I love Liszt." Mendelssohn too. "I think he is neglected as a composer." Then he hesitates for a moment. "Perhaps I should mention that Rachmaninoff is my number one favourite."

This time, out of all these favourites, Rachmaninoff is on his programme and nothing less than the magnificent Sonata No. 2 in B flat minor, op. 36. Schoeman will play the revised shorter version with its 'greater power of expression'. In the choicest Afrikaans in typical interview fashion, Schoeman continues: "Rachmaninoff started working on this masterpiece in 1913, when he and his family were living in Rome in the same house where Tchaikovsky had lived earlier. At this time, Rachmaninoff's two daughters caught typhoid fever and became extremely ill. This upset the composer terribly and he took the girls to Berlin for the best possible treatment. His poured his ecstatic joy at their recovery into the final part of the Sonata."

There is another reason why the second half of Schoeman's programme consists of works by Russian composers, including Tchaikovsky's *Concert Suite from The Nutcracker*, op. 71, transcribed by Mikhail Pletnev. "This year marks the centenary of Russia's October Revolution," said Schoeman.

He also likes to introduce audiences to twentieth-century music and chose the *Dances of Marosszék* by the Hungarian composer Zoltán Kodály for his programme. "I think the piano version is better than the original orchestral version, and speaking as a composer, it is a tour de force. It consists of dances in which Kodály exploits possibilities for extraordinary articulation and different emotions that culminate in a rousing conclusion."

I, the undersigned, Mrs Gillian Frances Allen de Jager, certify that this document is a true and accurate translation from Afrikaans into English of an electronic news report on the internet news website Netwerk24, from the link to the web site sent to me by the client.

 at Pretoria on 3 October 2017

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The programme begins with Ferruccio Busoni's transcription of *Ich ruf zu dir, Herr Jesu Christ* by JS Bach.

Recordings

In addition to a CD of Russian music that Schoeman recorded with the South African cellist Anzél Gerber (she now lives in Vienna), and another planned recording by this duo, Schoeman will work intensively on the production of solo CDs. "My next CD will contain music from the Romantic period, for which I have a partiality. Works from this period have such a tremendously enthralling style."

His only solo album to date contains works by Liszt which were recorded by TwoPianists Records and this album is distributed by Naxos Global.

A project that also keeps Schoeman busy is his duet concerts with Tessa Uys. Together they perform Beethoven's nine symphonies, transcribed for four hands (piano duets). Uys, also a South African pianist in London, and Schoeman have already achieved great success for Symphonies No. 3 (*Eroica*) and No. 9 (*Choral symphony*).

The chamber music concerts scheduled for immediately after the South African tour are too many to mention. Schoeman did say, however, that he is crazy about chamber music with wind players – "the clarinet and flute repertoire is particularly interesting". He often performs with a cousin, the flautist Dawid Venter (also based in London), and is giving his five-year old son piano lessons.

Schoeman says that "major works" (such as Beethoven's *Hammerklavier* Sonata) and "large projects" are on his agenda. "I can tackle them now without feeling guilty when I practise. Academic work is naturally important too, and I shall publish more articles, but now my concert career takes precedence."

Prizes

- 11th Unisa International Piano Competition (Pretoria, 2008): First prize.
- Royal Overseas League Music Competition (London, 2009): Gold medal.
- Standard Bank Young Artist Award for Music (2011).
- kykNET-Fiësta (2012).
- Cleveland International Piano Competition (USA, 2013): Contemporary music prize.
- Huberte Rupert Prize of the South African Academy of Arts and Sciences (2016).

Tour Programme

20 August: Overstrand, Hermanus

21 August: Knysna

24 August: Odeion, Bloemfontein

31 August: Durban City Hall. Mozart's Concerto No. 20 with the KwaZulu-Natal Philharmonic Orchestra.

Afrikaans: <http://www.netwerk24.com/Vermaak/Musiek/doktor-gaan-nou-al-sy-aandag-aan-konserte-gee-20170818>

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Ben Schoeman: Piano Recital
Odeion Theatre
Bloemfontein

Review by Elretha Britz / Volksblad

Few pianists would attempt a challenging programme such as that of the South African pianist, Ben Schoeman, and moreover transform it into a resounding tour de force. Each piece was a highlight.

By the opening bars of the short Bach piece, *Ich ruf zu dir, Herr Jesu Christ*, several outstanding facets were noticeable: his exceptional sound, overwhelming pianism, unique expression and above all, his understanding of the architecture of each work.

Kreisleriana, one of Schumann's greatest solo piano works, is an intellectual composition which requires intense insight to captivate listeners from the first to the eighth section.

Given Schumann's complex personality and his tendency to depression, he alternates between introverted passages and rousing outbursts in his compositions. That is exactly how the *Kreisleriana* is structured – extremely fast sections abruptly alternating with intensely slow sections.

Schoeman began with a sound so transparent that it felt as if one was gazing through a window right into the soul of the music. He brightly articulated the multitudinous runs in the fast sections while at the same time keeping strong control over the intensity of the sound, whether pianissimo or fortissimo, crescendo or decrescendo.

In the seventh section (faster than fast) and finale (fast and playful) he blended expression with technical prowess in a masterful display.

Kodály's *Dances of Marosszék* continued the virtuoso demands. This work was originally written for orchestra, yet in Schoeman's rendition the piano version still sounded like an orchestral performance.

Again, he performed the challenges, large chords and repetitive notes at an astonishing tempo with musical ease. The audience was so enthralled by the finest sounds in the upper register to the thundering passages in the lower register, that no one even coughed.

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Transcriptions are well-known for their virtuosity and Mikhail Pletnev's rendition of Tchaikovsky's *Concert Suite* from *The Nutcracker*, *op. 71a*, is no exception. What a feast it was of tonal colours and f melodies! Schoeman delineated each part characteristically, the *Trepak* dancing in a Russian manner, delicate Chinese sounds in *The Tea*, an impressive March, and to top it all, a perfect celeste sound in the *Dance of the Sugarplum Fairy*. I was struck speechless with amazement.

The programme ended with the revised shortened version of Rachmaninoff's *Sonata No. 2 in B flat minor*, *op. 36*, which, like most of his compositions, is not child's play.

Judging by Schoeman's vigour in tackling the grotesque start of this work, he was still as fresh as at the beginning of the evening. He expressed the brooding, melancholy character while never shirking Rachmaninoff's large chord hand-span reaches of 13 notes.

One will reminisce about this performance for a long time still, to which Schoeman gave gravitas with integrity and a thorough exploration of the soul of each work.

This Steinway pianist, who lives in London, has developed into an authoritative artist with his own distinct character and he is definitely ready to record for an internationally renowned label. Now that he can devote all his attention to his concert career, his playing ought to open doors to the most select international concert circuits.

Bravo, Ben Schoeman! We look forward to your next performance in Bloemfontein.

<file:///C:/Users/schoeman.m/Downloads/Ben%20Schoeman%20lewer%20kragtoer%20%20Netwerk24.html>

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